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ARCHIVIST

Hot air for head lice

Insecticide shampoos such as those that contain pyrethroids or lindane are not very effective at killing head louse eggs, may be contraindicated for patients with asthma and may give rise to resistance in head lice. Louse combs may be ineffective unless used for long periods of time. Body lice, close relatives of head lice, die when exposed for 5 min to a blow dryer delivering air at 50°C. Researchers in Salt Lake City, USA (Brad M Goates and colleagues. *Pediatrics* 2006;**118**:1962–70) have assessed six different methods of killing head lice using hot air.

The study included 169 children aged ⩾6 years who had head lice and had not used a pediculocide in the past 2 weeks. The methods tested were a bonnet-style hairdryer, a handheld blow dryer with diffuse heating, a handheld blow dryer with directed heating, a wall-mounted dryer of the type used in public toilets (detached from the wall), a high volume hot air blower (the Louse-Buster) and the Louse-Buster with a hand piece combing device. The proportion of eggs killed varied from 89% with the bonnet-style hairdryer to 98% with the directed handheld blow dryer and the Louse-Buster with hand piece. The children were treated for about 30 min in their own homes, stopping temporarily if they indicated any discomfort. The proportion of lice killed varied from 10% with the bonnet-style hair dryer to 80% with the Louse-Buster with hand piece. The 11 children treated with the Louse-Buster with hand piece were followed-up after 1 week; 10 were louse-free; the other had only a single louse.

The authors of this paper recommend their custom-built machine, the Louse-Buster for use in schools but Archivist would guess that many parents might prefer to use their own hairdryers at home. Further research may be needed to determine the optimal way to use domestic hairdryers and their effectiveness.